Budget Address
2015 - 2016

presented by

Premier

Darrell Pasloski

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MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY

Mr. Speaker, Honourable members and guests, it is my honour and privilege today to table the 2015-2016 Budget, the fourth budget of the Thirty-Third Yukon Legislative Assembly.

The official purpose of the Budget Speech is to inform the House and to inform Yukoners how we are managing the territory's finances.

As Premier and as Minister of Finance, I consider this is one of my most important tasks.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon's Budget for 2015-2016 is $1 billion and $367 million ($1,367,070,000).

The Operation and Maintenance Budget totals $1.054 billion, of which $111.537 million is recoverable.

The Capital Budget is $312.8 million, of which $46.9 million is recoverable.

The 2015-2016 Budget has a healthy $23.2 million surplus.

This budget is all about putting Yukoners to work.

Mr. Speaker, for that reason as Minister of Finance I have purchased a new pair of work boots instead of a new pair of shoes.

Our government will stimulate the private sector economy by reducing taxes and putting more money in the pockets of Yukoners.

And we will continue implementing, budget by budget, our government's vision of prosperity for the territory by making Yukon the best place in Canada to live, work, play and raise a family.

That vision is the focus of this Budget Speech.

Sir John A. MacDonald once said "A set definite objective must be established if we are to accomplish anything in a big way."

In other words, vision is a prerequisite of achievement.

Since this Yukon Party team was elected in 2011, our aim has been clear: to move forward together on the path towards a stronger and more prosperous Yukon.

And it is our belief that this aim is inseparable from our goal of making Yukon a net contributor to Canada.

Why is this important?

It's important because economic self-sufficiency is the best path to economic strength.

And economic strength is necessary to build the Yukon we all want.

As long as we rely on federal transfer payments, as long as we rely on other hard-working Canadians, we will not be economically secure.

And it's not just a matter of economics.

Mr. Speaker, we have a moral obligation to take economic responsibility for ourselves.

That is why a core principle guiding this Yukon Party government since its election has been to develop Yukon's economic strength so that our economy can stand on its own and, eventually, contribute to the general wealth of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, what defines political parties are our fundamental principles.

An example is the Yukon Party believes that the private sector is the engine that drives economic growth.

And if the private sector is the "engine", we want to be the "transmission" that will enable the engine to power forward.

Mr. Speaker, we want to put the transmission in "drive."

Some members of this House want to put the transmission in "park."

They want to "park" the Yukon economy, Mr. Speaker.

They are opposed to the free entry system for mining.

They are opposed to the use of LNG.

They are opposed to hydro development.

They are opposed to oil and gas development.

They are opposed to all the positive initiatives in this budget.

In the same breath, they say they support economic diversification when they have ruled out the majority of Yukon's economic mainstays.

Being opposed to everything doesn't prepare you for governing.

We believe it is possible to have the best of both worlds: responsible development and a healthy environment.

It is not a choice of either or.

In 2011, we told Yukoners where we stand in the Yukon Party Platform and we have been delivering on these commitments, year by year, budget by budget.

Mr. Speaker, we know there are some challenging economic times ahead as a consequence of the downturn in the metal markets.

This challenge can become an opportunity.

We have an opportunity to make some bold strides forward by investing in infrastructure and programs and services on behalf of all Yukoners.

And that is precisely what this Budget aims to do.

We are very proud to have a record capital investment that will put Yukoners to work and create a legacy that will benefit the whole community for years to come.

That capital investment is only possible because of the fiscal leadership of this government.

We believe in managing finances in a way that ensures we have money when we need it most.

Yukoners are tightening their belts this year, which is why we are making these investments and providing tax relief – that what our fiscal management over the past decade allows us to do.

I want Yukoners to know that we are committed to continuing with reliable responsible fiscal management.

Over the coming years, we expect that growth in our Territorial Formula Financing to slow over previous years.

While we won't face the same challenges other jurisdictions are facing around cuts and reductions, we are facing a period where restraint and responsible investment are required.

Yukoners can trust this government to manage finances in the good times and the lean times – something the other parties can't say.

MAKING YUKON THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE

Our focus has always been, and will continue to be, on Yukoners.

We are committed to making Yukon the best place to live in Canada.

Our first step in this regard is to further reduce the tax burden on Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, our government will be amending the Yukon *Income Tax Act* and Regulations.

A few of these key amendments will include:

- revising the personal income tax rate structure;
- significantly increasing the Yukon Child Benefit;
- increasing the political contribution tax credit to match on an ongoing basis the federal political contribution tax credit; and
- aligning the Yukon Children's Fitness Tax Credit with the federal Children's Fitness Tax Credit.

In addition, we are working in consultation with First Nations to undertake two major initiatives to improve the territory's regulatory and permitting regimes.

One is the Mine Licensing Improvement Initiative (MLII), which will clarify the roles of regulatory agencies and make sure that the many levels of our regulatory system work well together.

In no way will this lessen environmental protection or oversight of mining activity.

The second major initiative is the Mineral Development Strategy (MDS), to be completed in a year, which covers business climate, infrastructure, First Nation engagement, environmental stewardship and workforce training.

Mr. Speaker, underlying all of our initiatives with regard to making Yukon the best place to live is our commitment to strengthening our partnerships with Yukon First Nations.

Yukon has just less than half of the modern, comprehensive land claims agreements in Canada.

Yukon self-government agreements are unique in Canada, if not the world.

It is in everyone's best interest for the Yukon Government and Yukon First Nation governments to work together for the betterment of all Yukoners and we are committed to doing just that.

While our government believes that comprehensive land claims and self-government agreements through the Umbrella Final Agreement process are the best path to follow, we are prepared to negotiate reconciliation agreements with the three non-settled First Nations.

We have already entered into negotiations with the White River First Nation, the Kaska Dena Council, Liard First Nation and the Ross River Dena Council to negotiate non-treaty reconciliation agreements.

While the Opposition parties focus on the issues where the Yukon Government and First Nations governments disagree, there are far more areas where First Nation governments and the Yukon Government agree and work collaboratively together.

Even on matters such as YESAA, where we disagree on a few issues, there is agreement on the majority of recommendations.

Seventy-two versus four, Mr. Speaker.

My message to Yukon First Nations on Bill S-6 is to let it pass through the federal process as-is and then let's sit down and resolve any difficulties with its implementation through the negotiation of a bilateral accord.

The Yukon Government and Yukon First Nations have demonstrated in the past that we can resolve any differences we may have between our respective governments.

We've done it before; we can do it again.

Equally important is our relationship with the Government of Canada, our sister territories, and the provinces.

Canada is a federation founded on cooperation and partnerships.

Canada's relationship with the three northern territories is especially important because, unlike the provinces, Canada owns all the land and resources North of 60°.

What this means is that Canada will be the major beneficiary of resource development in the North.

Under the current revenue arrangement, Yukon would be able to retain just over $50 million.

Our vision of building a prosperous Yukon and becoming a net contributor to Canada could happen very quickly.

This is why our government continues to urge Ottawa to partner with us by investing in major infrastructure projects to help develop our vast resources.

We need more and better roads to access our resources.

We need more reliable and redundant telecommunications infrastructure to drive the expansion of our IT sector.

And we need an abundant and affordable supply of clean power to ensure that as we grow, we grow responsibly.

We are moving forward on all these fronts.

And we took a major step in November 2013 when our government directed the Yukon Development Corporation to plan a new large-scale hydro dam to power our future.

It will be another ten or fifteen years before the project is completed, but we need to be proactive about infrastructure development.

And our action now will be rewarded in the future.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure projects like these have long horizons.

But we are undertaking many other initiatives whose impacts can already be felt.

For instance, we're dedicating significant resources to making land available to Yukoners.

In rural Yukon, we have signed Memorandums of Understanding with seven municipalities to work towards providing land for potential territorial, municipal and private development.

And in Whitehorse, we will be allocating $7.7 million for the start of Phase 3 of Whistle Bend – ownership of Phases 1 and 2 was already transferred to the City of Whitehorse in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, in order for Yukon to be the best place to live we need healthy citizens and safe communities.

This government has a strong track record of investing in infrastructure and programming to support a healthy, active lifestyle and to enhance community safety.

I could talk at length about the many initiatives we're undertaking to this end, but I'll just point out a few highlights.

Recently, the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada signed a new five-year Northern Wellness Approach agreement worth over $2 million to promote healthy living and build capacity at the community level.

We've also extended the popular Municipal Domestic Water Well program, which will allow eligible property owners in participating municipalities to apply for a low-interest loan to develop domestic wells.

And in Ross River, we are committing $250,000 towards the purchase of a new water delivery truck.

This Budget also commits significant funds towards addressing community safety issues like wildfires, emergency services, and flooding:

- To mitigate the risk of wildfires, we will provide $850,000 to fund Fire Smart projects across the territory over the next year;
- To improve emergency services, we will make Basic 9-1-1 available to all Yukon communities and will continue to invest in modernizing our emergency fleet vehicles and infrastructure, including the construction of a new $3.8 million fire hall in Carcross this year; and
- To manage the risk of flooding, we will allocate over $1.5 million in this budget for flood and erosion control projects in Carcross, Mayo and the Liard River.

Mr. Speaker, there's no way I could talk about the Yukon as the best place to live without reference to our beautiful, clean environment.

The Yukon Government is doing its part to ensure it stays that way.

That's why we are investing more than $5 million for remediation work at contaminated sites to minimize the risks to human health and the environment.

One of the legacies left to us to clean up is the Marwell Tar Pit, the largest hydro-carbon-contaminated site in Yukon.

We are in year five of a ten-year project to remediate the site with a cost of up to $2.5 million in 2015-2016, and we will invest up to that same amount in remediating other contaminated sites that we own across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, another significant initiative we are undertaking to protect our environment is the Yukon Water Strategy and Action Plan.

The importance of water to our livelihood and to our identity cannot be overstated.

We are a territory of rivers, lakes, streams, and glaciers.

As part of this action plan, we will further develop a groundwater program, expand our water monitoring network, and improve access to drinking water to ensure that future generations continue to enjoy the abundance of clean water that we have been so fortunate to experience.

MAKING YUKON THE BEST PLACE TO WORK

Mr. Speaker, making Yukon the best place to work is what the 2015-2016 Budget is all about.

This is the largest Capital Budget in Yukon's history.

Our government has heard loud and clear that Yukon's private sector is facing economic challenges and it is time for government to invest in public infrastructure.

Highways, resource roads, bridges, airports and aerodromes are integral to our development and high on the list of priorities that create jobs for Yukoners.

Over the coming year, Yukoners will be doing work on the Campbell Highway.

Yukoners will be doing work on the Dempster Highway.

Yukoners will be doing work on the Klondike Highway.

And while funding for the Shakwak Agreement to improve the Alaska Highway and Haines Road remains in limbo, we will use the remaining funds, some $10 million, to put Yukoners to work rehabilitating sections of it.

Yukoners will also be doing work on bridges, specifically the Partridge Creek Bridge, the Nares River Bridge, and the Tatchun Creek Bridge, and on airports and aerodromes, ensuring that our entire transportation network is in top condition.

Specifically, Yukoners will be put to work providing almost $5 million of upgrades to community aerodromes.

And in Whitehorse, Yukoners will be put to work providing pavement overlays to the Parallel Runway and Taxiway A and E, and developing twenty lease lots on the south side of Apron II to address the demand for small lots at the Whitehorse Airport.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also includes funds of $13.5 million to provide for government's building infrastructure, plus an additional $1.4 million to maintain Yukon Housing Corporation stock.

But we're not just investing in re-roofing, painting, and energy upgrades.

We're investing over $11 million in tech infrastructure of which $4.8 million is allocated for e-Health and there is an additional $2.1 million for school-based IT.

Among other things, our tech investments include a platform to enable online permitting and licensing for fishing, camping, hunting, transport, and trades.

I'm sure I'm not the only one in this room who is very much looking forward to the convenience of getting my camping permit online when my family and I decide to go away for the weekend at the last minute.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon is steadily becoming the tech hub North of 60°.

The Technology and Telecommunications Directorate of the Department of Economic Development is receiving over $800,000 to extend beyond its two-year mandate in order to advance the technology and communications sector.

This extension will support the business development phase of the Diverse Fibre Project with the goal of building a second fibre optic link into Yukon.

Alaska Power and Telephone plans to lay down a marine fibre optic cable in the Lynn Canal linking Skagway, Haines and Juneau, which will make a fibre optic link through Skagway a promising option for the future.

We are examining another possible link in collaboration with the Northwest Territories utilizing the MacKenzie Valley and Dempster Highway.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to facilitating work through public infrastructure investment, the Yukon Government also has four dedicated funds that allow enterprising Yukoners to pursue the economic opportunities they want.

One of the most popular is the Community Development Fund (CDF).

Over the past year, our government approved almost $3 million in funding of eighty-two projects throughout the territory in areas from tourism to sports, to First Nations culture.

Also over the past year, fifty-six projects were approved for the Enterprise Trade Fund, totalling over $200,000.

Twenty-seven projects from Yukon communities for things like strategic planning, land development, and bioenergy were approved under the Regional Economic Development Fund, for a total value of over $300,000.

And sixteen projects were approved under the Strategic Industries Development Fund fund for a total of over $800,000.

One of these projects was a collaboration between Vuntut Development Corporation and Northern Cross (Yukon) to examine the possibility of building and operating a petroleum refinery in the Eagle Plains area.

Many Yukoners were put to work by these funds and more jobs will be created in 2015-2016.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is one of Yukon's economic mainstays that employs many Yukoners.

The more tourists who visit Yukon, the more Yukoners who are employed.

Yukon is always looking to expand its markets.

The Minister of Tourism and Culture and twelve tourism industry delegates recently returned from the first-ever Minister led tourism mission to Asia in late February as part of the Yukon NOW marketing program.

Accomplishments included:

- the launch of Tourism Yukon's first ever Chinese website: www.travelyukon.cn;
- the signing of Yukon's largest ever partner agreement between the Yukon Government and the Canadian Tourism Commission in Japan for a marketing campaign; and
- commitments by Japanese and Chinese tour operators to enter into cooperative marketing agreements to market travel packages reflecting Yukon as a year-round travel destination.

The Yukon NOW campaign has been a very successful one so far and I encourage everyone to visit Tourism and Culture's website to have a look at the many resources there, including the Digital Storytelling Project and the User Generated platform that allows Yukoners and visitors to post pictures, videos and other content to tell the world about what makes Yukon the best place to visit and to live.

Mr. Speaker, tourism and arts and culture fit together like hand in glove.

Our museums and First Nations cultural centres play a critical role in promoting and preserving Yukon's heritage and culture.

The Yukon Government provides operational funding to eleven museums and seven First Nation cultural centres, and we will be increasing this funding by 20% over the next two fiscal years, from around $1.5 million in 2014-2015 to almost $2 million in 2016-2017.

We are also moving forward with the detailed design phase of the Yukon Archives vault expansion project at a cost of $629,000 to ensure the Archives continue to preserve our rich documentary heritage as the existing space reaches capacity.

MAKING YUKON THE BEST PLACE TO PLAY

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken quite a bit about encouraging visitors to come experience all Yukon has to offer, but Yukoners need no invitation to take advantage of our territory's tremendous recreational opportunities.

Yukoners love to play, and we especially love to play outside.

We love hunting.

We love fishing.

We love camping.

Expanding access to Yukon's Wilderness is a priority for us.

We're working with several Yukon First Nations to make some lake front cottage lots available to Yukoners at various lakes throughout the territory.

And we are moving forward with the expansion of our territory's campgrounds.

Specifically, we are working with the Carcross Tagish First Nation Development Corporation to clear the site for the new Conrad campground on Tagish Lake's Windy Arm, which will open in 2016.

The bulk of the work on this 35 site campground will take place this year with an allocation of $500,000.

And we're working carefully to ensure that the development of the campground is consistent with the objectives of the adjacent Conrad Historic Site, where the small town of Conrad supported the Venus silver mine in the early 1900's.

This year for the first time, we are committing $76,000 to allow 10 campgrounds to open on May 8th, weather permitting, rather than the May long weekend.

But we don't just play outdoors.

We love arts festivals, music festivals, theatrical plays, cultural festivals, Thaw di Gras, Sourdough Rendezvous, the Arctic Winter Games, and the Yukon Quest.

We love participating in a whole variety of different sports involving all age groups from the very young to the very old.

The government will continue to support this healthy active life style through sponsorships, funding arrangements, and direct investment in leisure facilities.

To that end, we're investing $400,000 in preliminary work on a new soccer and running track complex to be built in the Whistle Bend subdivision in Whitehorse.

And we recently announced a $400,000 increase in Community Recreation Assistance Grant funding for unincorporated Yukon communities.

In addition, we will allocate $1 million to support the 2016 Arctic Winter Games in Nuuk, Greenland, and $100,000 to support the Arctic X Games – an alternate event hosted in Yukon that provides a competitive opportunity for participants of those sports not included in the Arctic Winter Games.

MAKING YUKON THE BEST PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY

Mr. Speaker, if Yukon is the best place to live, work and play, it is a natural outcome that it's the best place to raise a family.

On the health, social and educational side of the ledger, Yukon has an array of facilities, programs and services second to none in Canada, and we are constantly striving to make them even better.

We took a big step in this direction with the official opening of the MRI facility at the Whitehorse General Hospital last February.

It is now fully operational.

This is Canada's first MRI North of 60°.

It will both reduce the costs for Yukon's medical travel program and spare MRI patients from having to travel and bear travel-related costs.

Mr. Speaker, health is an area in which we partner closely with Canada.

After the Territorial Health Access Fund (THAF) ended in March 2014, our government put a number of formerly federally-funded THAF programs into its base budget, including the Palliative Care, Public Health and Prevention, Rural Mental Health Services and Chronic Conditions Management programs at a cost of $2.4 million.

This year, the new Territorial Health Investment Fund (THIF) – please don't get me started on the acronyms! – will be allocated to chronic disease management, mental wellness initiatives, e-mental Health Supports, and medical travel.

e-Health is the transfer of health resources and health care by electronic means and currently has three components: a Client Registry; a Drug Information System; and a Lab Information System.

These systems will be implemented over the next two years with more than half of the almost $10 million capital cost recoverable from Canada Health Infoway, and will further bolster our already expanding e-Health service systems.

Mr. Speaker, as a small jurisdiction, it's not possible for us to be leaders in all areas of health, but in contending with FASD, Yukon is at the vanguard.

This government is committed to keeping us there:

- We are establishing a local Adult Diagnostic Clinic to replace the current itinerant model;
- We are training physicians and psychologists to better respond to individuals with FASD; and
- We are investing in the completion of the FASD Prevalence Study to look at the incidence of FASD, substance abuse, and mental health issues in the adult corrections population.

Our government is also working hard to find more long term care spaces for Yukoners to free up acute care hospital beds.

We recently purchased the Oblate Centre on 6th Avenue in Whitehorse and will be converting it into a small ten-bed continuing care facility to be opened late this fall at a cost of almost $2 million.

And on a larger scale, we will be proceeding with construction of the 150-bed Whistle Bend Care facility in January 2016 with an initial allocation of $26 million. We will design the facility to allow future expansion.

Dawson City will also see enhanced continuing care services when the new 15-bed McDonald Lodge opens in 2016 – another facility that will have an option to expand.

$7.8 million will be allocated from this Budget to the completion of the project.

Mr. Speaker, an important area of health that has not always had the attention it deserves because of a lack of understanding or because of social stigma is mental health.

This government is committed to changing that.

This Budget allocates funding to several mental health initiatives.

To help persons with mental health conditions develop their independence, we will provide transitional housing for a period of two months to two years.

To provide a safe and supportive group home to Yukoners who suffer from cognitive disabilities we will be rebuilding the St. Elias adult group home, and have already set aside over $4 million for its design and construction.

This new building will increase capacity from five to ten spaces and will be constructed by the Kwanlin Dun First Nation.

And to support Yukoners with enhanced alcohol and drug detoxification services, we will begin construction of the new Sarah Steele building this spring for a total target cost of $21 million.

The new complex is a much needed replacement of the old Sarah Steele building and will have enhanced medically supported detox, a separate youth detox unit, concurrent inpatient treatment for males and females, and continuous intake.

Two days ago, our government also had the pleasure of jointly announcing the contribution of over $13 million to the construction of a new Salvation Army centre that will provide improved and expanded services to some of our more vulnerable Yukon citizens.

Our partnership with the Salvation Army is a strong foundation upon which to build hope for those most in need.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy to see that with the construction of all these facilities Yukon's private sector is going to be very busy this construction season.

This work will be spread throughout the territory.

In Faro, our budget includes $3.5 million to begin construction of a replacement for the RCMP detachment in Faro.

And in keeping with our justice initiatives, we are happy to report we will be dedicating $500,000 annually to extend the Community Wellness Court pilot program for an additional three years.

Mr. Speaker, we're also taking steps to address women's issues in the territory.

A new Women's Legal Advocate will support women navigating legal and social systems and will provide training for front-line workers throughout the territory.

This coming October, the Women's Directorate will also launch an interactive website showcasing a current profile of women's equality in Yukon based on indicators like health, education, economic security, leadership, child care, safety, arts and athletics.

Mr. Speaker, housing is a Yukon Government priority.

Northern Housing Trust funding of $1.395 million is being provided to support affordable rental units of which $1.16 million is for units in Carmacks and $235,226 is for units in Carcross.

The remaining balance of $6.83 million in the Northern Housing Trust will be allocated to the following initiatives:

- $3.5 million for the Municipal Rental Construction Program to partner with municipalities to increase the supply of rental housing in Yukon communities;
- $1 million for the Rental Housing Allowance for families to enable low and moderate income families to access rental housing in the private market with a direct subsidy aimed at reducing incidences of core needs;
- $800,000 for Rental Quality Enhancement Grants to increase the quality of rental housing stock in Yukon to meet or exceed minimum rental standards;
- $800,000 for Accessibility Enhancement Grants to increase accessibility of housing stock for homeowners and landlords;
- $480,000 for Housing Action Plan (HAP) Implementation to provide contracting resources to implement HAP; and
- $250,000 for a public, private partnership plan for 5th and Rogers designed to increase the supply of affordable rental housing as well as meet other needs. This plan will maximize private sector investment and involve the City of Whitehorse.

In addition, the CMHC and the Yukon Government, under the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) Agreement, have agreed to match contributions of over $1.5 million per year over five years to fund affordable housing projects.

A portion of this funding must be targeted for victims of violence.

Also, a new 48-unit Seniors building on Front Street in Whitehorse is being constructed with funding of $13.5 million over two years, and a six-unit seniors building in Mayo is scheduled to be completed later this summer.

Mr. Speaker, our government is investing a further $7.5 million to complete the construction of the new F.H. Collins school this fall.

Once the school has been completed, there will be a procurement allocation of almost $3 million to provide furniture and equipment for the new school and an additional $3 million to upgrade the current Technical Education Wing at F.H. Collins school.

Mr. Speaker our government is investing heavily in improving all facets of Yukon's education system.

To address fundamental life skills, we are continuing work towards a Yukon Literacy Strategy.

And to address the needs of our post-secondary learners, we will be reviewing the *Student Financial Assistance Act* as well as the Yukon Apprenticeship Training and Tradesperson Certificate Program to ensure that both programs are modernized and synchronized with similar programs across Canada.

Another priority for all of us is closing the outcomes gap between rural and urban students, and between First Nations and non-First Nations students.

To this end, we work closely with communities, with the Council of Yukon First Nations and with individual First Nations themselves.

We are currently working with CYFN on a Joint Education Action Plan that focuses on the priorities of culture and language, authority and responsibility, sustainability supports and success, and student achievement.

And we have developed the Rural Equity Action Plan to promote distance learning and collaboration opportunities for students in our communities.

A similar initiative is currently underway in Watson Lake, where the Secondary School has piloted a new approach to education that "blends" online instruction with classroom instruction to provide more educational options.

As well, a new Residential Schools Curriculum is now part of the grade 10 Social Studies in three schools – Robert Service School in Dawson City, Tantalus School in Carmacks and Vanier Secondary School in Whitehorse.

Both the blended learning approach and the residential schools curriculum will be expanded to other communities in the future.

Mr. Speaker, we've concluded a number of important agreements to expand our research and post-secondary educational offerings.

We have approved over $6 million in funding for the Yukon Research Centre for the next five fiscal years, and we have entered into a 5 ½ year funding agreement with Yukon College to support the ongoing operation of the Northern Institute of Social Justice.

We will also be receiving funding from the federal government under the Canada-Yukon Job Fund Agreement (CJF), which was launched on September 4, 2014.

Over the next six years, Canada will provide Yukon with almost $6 million to encourage greater employer involvement in training and to enable Yukoners to develop the skills they need to find and maintain employment.

In addition, we've partnered with Canada on the Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD), which was signed last February.

Over the next four years, Canada will allocate $5 million to provide labour market support specifically to persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of exciting initiatives in this Budget, and I've only touched on the highlights here.

Suffice to say, I am confident that our commitment to being proactive, to taking steps now that will pay off immediately and well into the future, will continue to advance our vision of making Yukon the best place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

A NEW VISION: A MADE-IN-YUKON K-12 EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to return to education for a moment.

It has been said that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Ask just about anyone, and they'll tell you they agree with that statement.

But when the economy is struggling, when jobs are being lost, education is often shifted to the backseat – as an important policy focus, but not demanding immediate attention.

This Yukon Party government has never stopped working to improve Yukon's education system, but it is time to give education a permanent front seat spot.

Our most important job as leaders today is to prepare the leaders of tomorrow.

Education is not an alternative to investing in our economy; it IS an investment in our economy.

There are many economic factors we can't control.

We can't control mineral prices.

We can't control oil prices.

We can't control economic developments in other provinces or other countries.

But we can ensure that our kids get the best education possible so that whatever unexpected challenges arise in the future, they are ready to face them.

Over the coming months, we will be rolling out a new vision for education in Yukon.

We will be taking a comprehensive look at Yukon's education system, to assess what's working, what's not working, and how we can make it better.

And let me clear that this is not just a thought exercise.

This is not just about gathering our educational partners and stakeholders to produce a set of recommendations that will be filed away somewhere, never to be realized.

It's time for action.

It starts with the curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon is currently tied to British Columbia's curriculum.

In the *Education Act*, there is a provision for some local content, but it's not enough.

Our social and economic realities are not the same as B.C.'s.

One size does not fit all.

We need to ensure that our curriculum reflects the different aspirations of our diverse student body.

Not all of our students have the same aspirations.

Some want to attend university; some want to start their own businesses; some want to enter the trades; some want to start working as soon as possible.

We want them to have the competencies and skills that they need to follow any path they choose.

Yet despite this, we still offer only one standard; one educational stream through which all students must pass.

It's time to change that.

We need to offer education options that set students up for employment opportunities in all fields.

Our goal is an education system that is engaging and relevant for all our students.

Not only will it make for more satisfied students, I believe it will improve our labour market.

Young Yukoners with jobs are more likely to become Yukoners raising families.

Mr. Speaker, this alone will go a long ways to improving our education system.

But education is not just about the curriculum.

It's more than academics.

We used to talk a lot in education about "pedagogy."

Pedagogy literally means "guiding a child."

We need to bring this idea back into education.

Education needs to be a team effort among parents, educators, communities, our partners and all other stakeholders to guide each child towards adulthood.

In part, yes, this means academic guidance.

But it also means emotional support and personal guidance, focusing on the individual needs of our students.

A child who feels insecure, stressed, angry, or threatened will struggle to learn, and will struggle to develop fully as an individual.

School will never be a replacement for a healthy home, but if the fundamental promise of our education system is to develop the "whole child", then we cannot ignore students non-academic needs in school.

To that end, we will be focusing specifically on assessing what resources our schools and our educators require to ensure that those needs can be met.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will take time to develop but it will be time well spent.

And it won't just take time; it will take partnership.

We all know the old saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child.

Well, it also takes a whole community to educate one.

And so this initiative will depend in large part on bringing the community back into education.

We need parents to get more involved in their child's education both at school and at home.

We need educators and administrators to provide their professional input.

We need all departments that deal with youth, such as Justice and Health and Social Services, to share their corporate knowledge.

And we need First Nations to be partners in building a system that reflects their aims.

Improving outcomes for First Nations students has been a longstanding goal of the Yukon Government and of Yukon First Nations, and it will be a major focus of this initiative.

We need to have an honest and open conversation about how to improve First Nations student outcomes.

All of us involved want the very best for each of our students and we are committed to moving forward together with First Nations to find practical solutions to these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, in government, many of the decisions we make are based on economics.

And an investment in education will pay dividends in the future.

But we're not just doing this because it makes economic sense.

Many of us in this room are parents. All of us have been students.

I believe we can all see the value in investing in our kids, and I am hopeful that this will be an opportunity for us to unify around a common objective without letting politics or partisanship get in the way.

This is too important for that.

Our kids deserve better than that.

Achieving this vision won't be easy nor quick, but I have every confidence that we will make it happen.

More details will be rolled out in the coming months, but for now let me reiterate that this initiative will depend on us all working together.

It will involve everyone who has a stake in our educational systems, students, their parents, Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Teachers Association and expert educators, Yukon College, representatives from business and industry and all those who want to be involved.

As I said at the beginning of this speech, vision is a prerequisite of achievement.

We have the vision.

Now let's achieve it.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the conclusion of the Budget Address.

I am proud of the work this Yukon Party government has done since taking office.

And I look forward to the work that lies ahead.

This 2015-2016 Budget will put Yukoners to work and continues the pathway to prosperity we set out in our 2011 Election Platform, "Moving Forward Together".

It is designed to advance our government's vision of prosperity for the territory by making Yukon the best place in Canada; to live, work, play and raise a family.

Budget by budget we are achieving this goal.

May Divine Providence guide our deliberations.

I commend the 2015-2016 Budget to all members of this House.

May God Bless Yukon.

May God Bless Canada.

And God Save the Queen.